

Chronos and Cruiser are huddled around a computer terminal, their faces aglow from the electronic fireplace before them. Chronos breaks into the mainframe of a major university and from there makes a net run across the Atlantic to a naval base in Europe. There is no top-secret, for-your-eyes-only information. But the files are considered "secure" information. To the newly hackerized reporter it is very impressive. "One thing. Please don't launch any Titan missiles."

"We're not near anything like that," says Chronos. "Most of the stuff here is boring. It was just cool to know you could do it. Then you look for something else to do."

Through the Internet they travel back to Cleveland and work their way into the General Services Administration computer downtown.

Then Cruiser takes over and logs on to the system of a major sporting goods chain in Cleveland. They look over that day's sales and inventory — socks, jocks and bicycle locks. You can see the pride in their eyes. It's as if they're showing off blue ribbons from a science fair.

They talk about phones, phreaking they call it. If you call 200 WINGMAN, they say, a recording will tell you what number you're dialing from. They like

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using the phone to find the famous while billing someone else. They call the Vatican and ask for the pope. A guy speaking Italian seems to catch on and, in broken English, says, "No, you kenta speak to da pope." They talk with the secretaries of Dan and Marilyn Quayle in the White House. Neither is in. They don't leave a message. Cruiser has to get Chronos home. Curfew is close. He doesn't want to be grounded.

It had all begun several weeks ago with a phone call at the reporter's home. A reader had a question about one of his stories and the two had an amiable chat. The reader wanted to know what else the reporter was working on. The reporter talked about his recent interest in computer hacking. He wanted to know if it was still going on. He had read books and magazine articles on international superhackers and espionage-oriented computer rats but was more interested in the home-grown suburban variety. The reader said he could help and would call back.

A week later, the reporter got a call from a kid identifying himself only as "Cruiser." He said that he and another hacker, "Chronos," would meet for an interview only if their identities were protected and their activities were described vaguely enough so that they

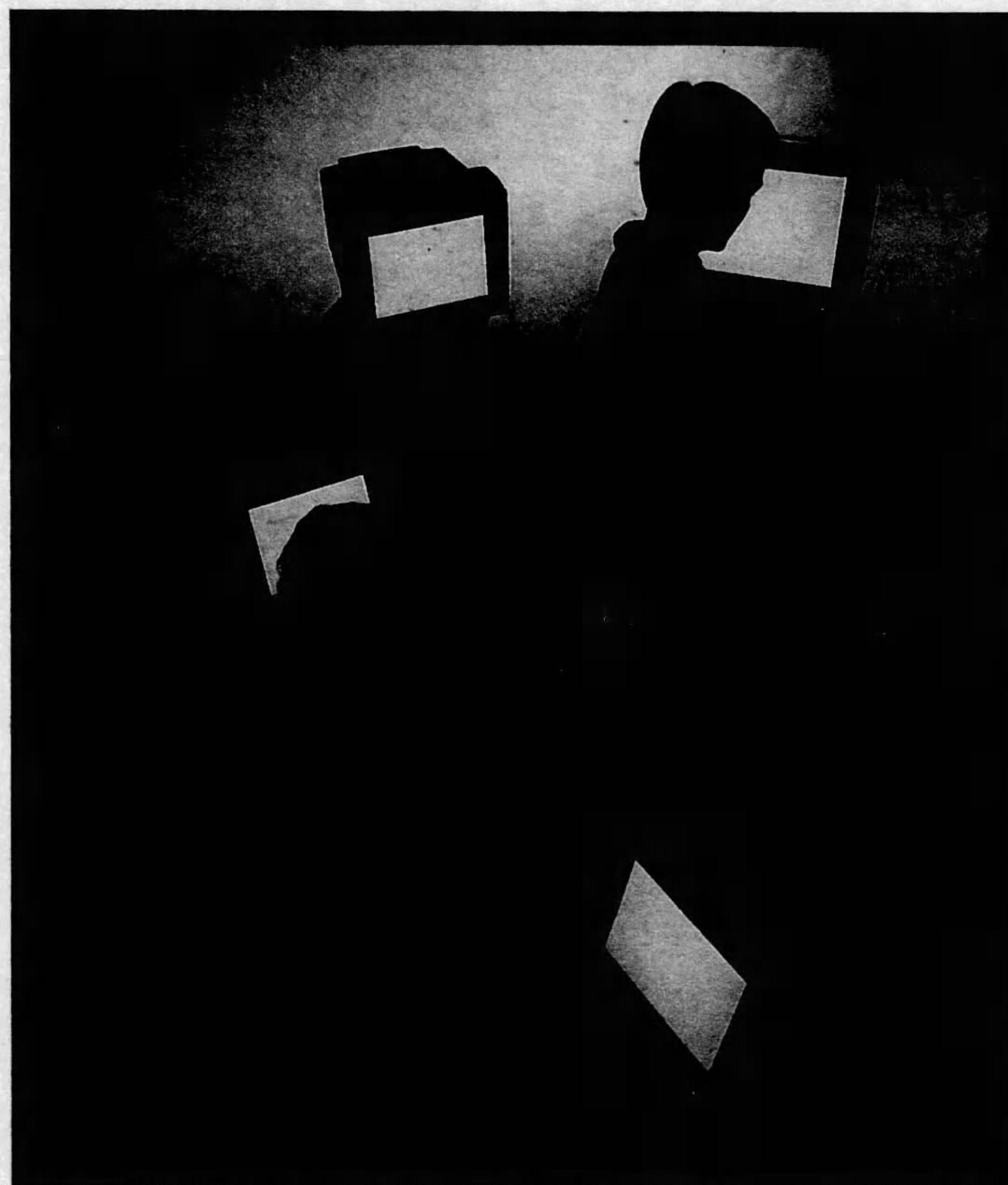
could keep pursuing their hobby undetected.

The reporter asked Cruiser if they would meet him in an out-of-the-way bar on the near West Side. "Chronos would have a problem with that. Could we meet in a coffee shop?"

*Continued on Page 12*

HAVE WE SEEN THE  
LAST OF CYBERPUNKS,  
PHREAKERS AND  
TECHNO-HIPPIES?

By Michael Heaton



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